

868
O
R E M A R K S

UPON AN

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

INTENDED BILL

FOR THE

RELIEF OF THE POOR,

NOW UNDER

CONSIDERATION OF PARLIAMENT.

By A COUNTRY MAGISTRATE.



L O N D O N :

Sold by W. BROWN, Corner of Effex-Street, Strand.

MDCCLXXVII.

Soc 2115.28

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

Harvard College Library,
Lord Rivers Pamphlet Collection.
Gift of Mrs. L. Bettman,
Feb. 28, 1903.

REMARKS, &c.

General Remark, That

ALTERATIONS in old systems are frequently productive of inconveniences, and require more new laws to rectify those inconveniences. — Proof — The many statutes since the 43d Eliz.

Objections.

The general expence of the public building. — The number of officers and servants necessary for the management. — The considerable salaries necessary for the officers, the appointment to which must create a power in some person. — The great expence in furniture. — The stock for the employment of such as can work (liable to embezzlement or waste, as in County stock for houses of correction). —

B

The

The despotic rule, and unfeeling behaviour of such governors, as a power of corporal punishment over the indolent and refractory will be necessary.—The danger of infection from the numbers.—The restraint of natural liberty ; and that the very old and the very young, the industrious and the idle, the humbly religious and the wicked, the infirm (merely from age) and the distempered profligate, must all be thrown into one general mass, or at least into different apartments in the same building, subject to the controul of the same sett of people, and subject to one and the same regimen of diet and clothing.

Old age forced from their own little dwellings and intacks, upon which they had spent their youthful labour and thought ; excluded from the friendly offices of children, relations, friends, and old neighbours, and every dear and social connexion ; forced into the conversation of persons as opposite to the feelings and wishes of old age (which naturally requires peace and contentment) as Hell to Heaven ; and obliged to give up the possession

possession or tenant-right of their cottage, and every article of furniture and property (that they flattered themselves they might call their own, and dispose of to their children and friends), before they can even be admitted to this place of punishment. It is allowed, that this would greatly reduce the expence of the Poor at present (I mean only that it would lessen the numbers upon the Parish-books); for I will venture to affirm, that 5000 in the first year after such a Bill took place, would die for want in their own cottages or dwellings, rather than be supported by so shocking and dreadful an alternative*.

Aspecious kind of answer will probably be made to the above objection, *viz.* That when the Poor want no further relief, they will be permitted to return home; but in what state will they find their little mansion? It will by that time either be reassumed by the Lord of the Manor, upon whose waste it

* If this plan should take place—*Query*, Whether it would not destroy private voluntary charity?

was built, or another put in possession of it, whom they cannot dispossess; or their mud walls decayed, fences broke down, and unfit for habitation or use, without one single article of furniture—not even a bed to lie upon.

Another part of the plan, is a power vested in the common Freeholders, to judge, amongst other particulars, of the proper objects to be sent or relieved. Surely no body of people would be more unfit. Every acting Magistrate must have often seen how anxious they are to save their own pockets, and, in general, how little compassion they are blessed with.

In whose hands might the superintendency and regulation of such house, its expences, and the objects therein, be more properly lodged? I suppose in the gentlemen of fortune in the same County; they would be the most proper; but even in them, in a few years, a true attention to such objects might be much relaxed, and would at last fall under
the

the inspection of a very few (indolence, or some other motive, would prevail, and excuses would be made for non-attendance); and thus the happiness or misery of numbers would be determined upon by those only whose vanity, or love of direction in public business, would induce them to undergo the trouble and fatigue of it: besides, such direction may become on some occasion an object of party dispute. I have known the trust or direction of a charity much contended for, without considering that charity and politics have no connection with each other.

Advantages arising from another Plan.

TO find fault with one plan that is specious, and represented as for the benefit of the Public, and not to attempt to offer something that may be thought better, would be deservedly esteemed disrespectful to the community, as well as to the author; therefore

therefore I will mention some reflections that have arose in my own breast when I have been thinking upon this subject, which indeed with regard to age, poverty, and imprisonment centering in the same person, gave me very uneasy sensations.—That some regulations with regard to the Poor, at least with respect to the indolent and the dissolute, may be necessary, I most readily agree to; and also with regard to the children of the Poor, which are to be the support of themselves as well as of our next generation, they also are objects truly worthy of a national attention.—Happy should I be, if a plan could be suggested, by which the old may in future be provided for to their own comfort and satisfaction; the young brought up and educated in such a way as will make them useful members of society; and the loose and the abandoned left to the correction of those laws which either at present subsist, or which may be thought proper to be revised, and, perhaps enforced with a very small alteration.

In the first place, with regard to the present list of Poor, (by which description I do not mean to include either the reprobate or the infant) I would leave them to the present provision of the 43d of Eliz. and that provision to one or more Justices of the Peace, and whether they should even be forced into a parochial workhouse under a statute of a later date; as I have often known instances, where those workhouses have been made use of as bugbears to prevent the really distressed applying to a parish for reasonable relief, when at the same time the wants of such paupers would have been satisfied in their own house with a less bounty than it would cost the parish to support them in a workhouse: therefore I would allow such a discretionary power to one or more Justice or Justices of the Peace. For I believe as the law and the determinations now stand, a Magistrate has not the power of ordering relief to any person at home, how ill soever he may be, or whatever may be the distemper, in case a parish officer
will

will offer to take such person into a work-house. But although I would wish for this indulgence to the Poor, at present ; I think a method may be pointed out for their future support, which will not lessen or abridge materially their comforts in their youth and prime of life, but would produce subsistence under sickness, infirmities, or old age. It is a plan which the sensible part of the lower class of mankind have themselves suggested to the Public, and which those who have wished to support life, and the disappointments thereof, with some degree of credit and reputation, have in many places already adopted : I mean the Clubs, or Amicable Societies, as they are called, which now prevail in almost every part of the kingdom, and do credit and honour to the members of it, and by which the true spirit of freedom and independency, so valuable to an Englishman, is, I think, most nobly supported and preserved. The general mode of which is this : That each member admitted into a society (before a certain age)

age) and continuing to pay the small sum of two-pence per week into their common box, or treasury, shall, after such member has been admitted a certain time, in case of illness, or other incapacity to earn a livelihood, (after such incapacity has been properly reported by the Surgeon of the Club) receive during such incapacity the sum of four shillings in some places, and five in others, by the week, for the support of himself and family, together with proper medical assistance. The Clubs have certain Rules and Orders drawn up amongst them, which tend greatly to the improvement of their morals and social behaviour. They have a monthly meeting, at each of which, each member that appears is allowed one pint of beer; and they have an anniversary meeting, conducted with great order, where all members are obliged to be present, unless prevented by illness, where they proceed to church, and have a sermon, for which they allow their chaplain half a guinea or more; and after church service is

C

over,

over, they have a public dinner of a shilling ordinary, and enjoy themselves in an honest and worthy festivity. This fund has from experience been found to answer the purpose of its institution to its several members, with a considerable saving in many of them, sufficient to form a capital for every purpose intended by it; and even an institution like this, is still capable of farther improvement and advantage. But taking it even upon the model which they themselves have formed, why may not Parliament adopt and enforce the same thing, and oblige every man, after such an age, to pay into the parish box the half of what is subscribed as above, which would be only one penny a week to the parish or place to which he belonged, or perhaps where his employment obliged him to reside? This pittance taken from the profits of a man when he is in full health and vigour would hardly be felt by him; and considering if this was made general, and every man was obliged to pay this weekly or monthly

monthly to some parish or place, from which he might hereafter expect relief, I do imagine it would raise such a sum as would be sufficient to support all those within that district that should hereafter by illness, incapacity, or old age, become obliged to ask relief during the time of their incapacity. But suppose it should not, without the full eight-pence a-month was paid in by each individual (which by dropping the allowances of two-pence for beer at each monthly meeting), would then be only six shillings and sixpence a-year (and which article of beer might be very well omitted); yet it would greatly lessen the present payments: and what parish, or what sett of men, could be so inhuman and hard-hearted, as not to make up with pleasure the deficiency, by the common method of levies, for the support of proper objects that wanted it, when they had had such a contribution from the young and healthful? A farther improvement on this plan would be, if three-pence

a-month was obliged to be paid in the same manner for the wife, when there was one, and only the half of the allowance made to a sick or infirm husband was made to such wife, in case of her illness. This would support the husband and wife under all the common misfortunes incident to human nature ; these payments would be made by the young and healthful, would hardly be felt in the vigour of life, and ought to be enforced, if not paid regularly by the husband, by confinement or some corporal punishment upon him ; it would secure to them a full relief and support, as soon as they wanted it ; it would introduce a habit of industry amongst a class of people, wherein it only (now) partially prevails, by obliging them to do something for to-morrow ; and would leave them an enjoyment of their liberty in those places where Providence had placed them, or their own inclinations had chose to settle them, in case of distress.

With

* With regard to children, whose minds should early in life be formed, and whose bodies should be inured to such labour as their years and strength would allow of, they are objects truly worthy the care and attention of the wisest and best legislature. The riches of a nation depend as much upon a good and proper introduction of them into life, as upon their numbers; each of which might be promoted by such a plan in each County, as the Foundling Hospital; and the support of which might be carried on by rates and levies upon the County. As soon as the parents chose to have them out of such hospital, and found themselves capable of supporting them, and putting them out to business, they should have them delivered up to them, upon condition that they should put them out to service or trade within the space of six months, if they could

* If this part of the plan should be disliked, on account even of the temporary separation of children from their parents, the Roman law of the *Jus trium Liberorum* might suggest a means whereby the parents might be assisted, and the children continue under their care.

not

not shew that they were capable of giving them such a provision as reasonably might be supposed to carry them through life. The parents at all times should have free access to visit those children in the said hospital; and if they had reasonable cause to complain, with respect to the maintenance and education of those children, they should have liberty to apply to a magistrate for redress. And in case the parents could not provide a proper master, the trustees of the hospital should bind them out as apprentices to such trades or agriculture as they should think most proper.

These hints may possibly suggest to minds that will think this subject worthy of their attention, a mode by which the present old and infirm, though needy, may not be disturbed in their possessions, but may live in peace with the charitable contributions of their neighbours, and die in quiet in their beds. Indeed it may be doubted, whether any comfortable provision could be made for them

them in any public hospital ; for the old are to be treated in their own way, and in their own mode of living, if they are to be happy, or at least not miserable ; and no general table would suit, perhaps, with the constitution of aged and infirm ; and they would follow the example of old Parr, who lived in his cottage to the age of one hundred and thirty-five, but, upon removal, soon died for want in the King's kitchen. With regard to children, the terror of a large family, which is the only thing that prevents marriage and population, would be guarded against, by such necessitous children being introduced, and taken care of as above. In this public nursery, their parents would have the satisfaction of seeing them brought up well, if they were not able to provide a maintenance for them themselves. With regard to the dissolute and refractory, surely our own vagrant laws, or something like them, would be sufficient to make them useful, or at least not dangerous to society ; and why may not the new order for employing the abandoned,

and

and those that will not comply with the rules of society, but are convicted as such, and are employed to clear the river Thames, be also applied to such sturdy and refractory vagabonds?

One hint more, perhaps, worthy to be considered of, and regarded, is the inclosure of our waste lands or commons, many of which are very valuable, but remain uncultivated, to the great damage of the Public. Some space of time, or perhaps the term of seven years, should be allowed to lords of manors and freeholders to inclose such wastes and commons, and appropriate them to their own use, if they thought it worth their while so to do; but if neglected for that time, why should not the Poor have the liberty to erect a cottage for the shelter of themselves and families, inclosing and improving, at the same time, not less than two acres of such waste to be occupied therewith, paying a small rent for two lives to the lord of the manor, and the freeholders in a proper proportion;

and

and after the determination of such lives, the same cottage and two acres should be vested, in trustees for the use of the poor of such parish? This in time would increase the fund already proposed, for the assisting of the Poor; would promote agriculture, (which, according to Bacon, is the true wealth of this nation) would also increase the numbers of our people, and they would be bred up a laborious and hardy race, and add strength and increase to our fleets and armies. Nay, this scheme might perhaps be farther improved by an appropriation immediately of certain parcels of waste lands which are to be found in every County for the use of the Poor, to be a perpetual fund for that purpose;—satisfaction to be made for the same land (to be valued as it is in its present neglected state) to the proprietors out of the County rates, or by some other mode. I have heard of a Merchant in Queen Anne's reign, that would have undertaken to have supported the Palatines, who were at that time in this kingdom, in

D

great

great numbers, in a most distressed condition, could he have obtained a grant of a large waste, (which to this day remains uncultivated) together with a bounty of forty shillings for each man of them that had a family.---What an acquisition of wealth and power at this day would it have been to the nation, had his scheme taken place! Something of this sort might still be brought to a full maturity, if properly considered.---I hope some beneficial plan for the employment and comfort of the needy may be found out to be a future fund, but with no plan to operate or prevail so distressing as that already remarked on, and which must necessarily draw down the helpless and the poor with a treble portion of misery and sorrow to the grave.

F I N I S.